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FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA  
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INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000812

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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE JISMAIL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [AL](#)  
SUBJECT: ALBANIA'S SMALL PARTIES STAGE HUNGER STRIKE

Classified By: Ambassador J. Withers, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) On November 10, Ilir Meta, head of small opposition party LSI, gathered ten other small party leaders and disgruntled members of the DP and SP to protest the proposed electoral code by staging a hunger strike in the Parliament's plenary meeting room. They are protesting provisions in the code that would exclude their small parties from seats on the local, regional, or central voting and counting commissions. However, as opposition Leader Edi Rama told visiting DAS Jones two weeks ago, the SP is happy with the new electoral code and expects it to pass soon.

¶2. (C) The strike began November 10 and was met with a ham-fisted response by the administration. Electricity and heat were turned off, cell phones were jammed, and all entrances to the building were blocked preventing entrance. An ambulance was turned away and media sympathetic to the government refused to broadcast any coverage of the strike. After requests by the internationals, Parliament Speaker Topalli restored electricity and heat and allowed medical personnel to enter the building. An estimated 3000 protesters gathered outside the building, some staying in tents during the night. A small scuffle broke out when police tried to remove one of the tents. On November 13, the strikers sat peacefully in the meeting room posing for the media while a plenary session, with no real content or agenda, was held.

Comment

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¶3. (C) It is not clear how this standoff will end. If the authorities decide to use force to remove the strikers, their supporters, which could number in the thousands, could respond in kind. If the strikers are simply ignored, as they have been today during the Parliamentary session, they may decide to escalate their actions. The strike seems to have been poorly planned, with the strikers expecting the foreign community to step in and pressure the major parties, although the strikers themselves never entered into direct negotiations with either the SP or DP on the issue. However, the EU ambassadors seem to be united in letting the Albanians sort this one out themselves. We have conveyed the message that the way to succeed in a democracy is to negotiate with your political peers, and, failing that, bring the issue to a Parliamentary vote.

WITHERS